



### Top Stories

#### US automaker bailout deal fails to pass Senate



Image Credit: Bull-Doser PD

A US\$14 billion bailout package deal for the "Big Three" United States automakers — Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors — has been rejected in the United States Senate after failing a procedural vote. The final vote count in the Senate was 52-35 against the bill, eight votes short of the 60 needed to pass.

#### Obama announces choice for Secretary of Housing

United States President-elect Barack Obama has announced Shaun Donovan as his choice for the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Donovan is currently New York City's housing commissioner.

#### Mugabe declares Zimbabwe cholera crisis under control



Image Credit: US Department of Defence PD

Robert Mugabe, the President of the African country of Zimbabwe, denied reports that the country is suffering from a cholera outbreak in a nationally televised address on Thursday, saying that doctors and the World Health

Organization have curbed the epidemic.

### Top Stories

Organisation have curbed the epidemic.

### Wikipedia Current Events

Switzerland becomes the 25th European country to join the Schengen Agreement, whereby cross-border passport checks will be abolished.

- The Channel Island of Sark, a British crown dependency, holds its first democratic elections under a plan to abolish feudalism.

- Anti-police riots continue in Athens and several cities across Greece.

- Ireland issues an international recall of its pork products following the discovery of contaminated pig feed.

- Patriarch Alexy II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, dies of heart failure in Peredelkino, Russia.

- A bombing kills 29 people and injures more than 100 in Peshawar, Pakistan.

#### Obama announces choice for Secretary of Housing

United States president-elect Barack Obama has announced Shaun Donovan as his choice for the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Donovan is currently New York City's housing commissioner.

The announcement was made in Obama's weekly address, in which

the president-elect discussed his reasons for selecting Donovan, and discussed the importance of what he announced will be his department.

"To stem the rising tide of foreclosures and strengthen our economy, I've asked my economic team to develop a bold plan that will dramatically increase the number of families who can stay in their homes," stated Obama in his address, adding "few will be more essential to this effort than the Department of Housing and Urban Development."

"From providing shelter to those displaced by Katrina to giving help to those facing the loss of a home to revitalizing our cities and communities, HUD's role has never been more important," continued Obama. "Since its founding, HUD has been dedicated to tearing down barriers in access to affordable housing -- in an effort to make America more equal and more just. Too often, these efforts have had mixed results."

Following the above comments, Obama described why he selected Donovan. "That is why we cannot keep doing things the old Washington way. We cannot keep throwing money at the problem, hoping for a different result. We need to approach the old challenge of affordable housing with new energy, new ideas, and a new, efficient style of leadership. We need to understand that the old ways of looking at our cities just won't do... No one knows this

better than the outstanding public servant I am announcing today as our next Secretary of Housing and Urban Development -- Shaun Donovan."

"As Commissioner of Housing Preservation and Development in New York City, Shaun has led the effort to create the largest housing plan in the nation, helping hundreds of thousands of our citizens buy or rent their homes," continued Obama. "Prior to joining Mayor Bloomberg's administration, Shaun worked both in business, where he was responsible for affordable housing investments, and at one of our nation's top universities, where he researched and wrote about housing issues. "

Donovan previously worked as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing at HUD, and was acting FHA commissioner under the Clinton administration.

### **White House considering auto rescue plan**

After a plan to bail out three large American auto companies failed to pass the Senate this week, the White House has said that it is considering using some of the US\$700 billion earmarked to rescue the banking industry to bail out the automakers.

The White House says that the collapse of the automakers would be a terrible setback that could destroy the economy.

"Under normal economic conditions we would prefer that markets determine the ultimate fate of private firms. However, given the current weakened state of the US economy, we will consider other options if necessary - including use of the TARP [Troubled Assets Relief Program] programme - to prevent a collapse

of troubled automakers," said Dana Perino, the White House Press Secretary. "A precipitous collapse of this industry would have a severe impact on our economy, and it would be irresponsible to further weaken and destabilize our economy at this time."

Earlier this week, the "Big Three" automakers - Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors - had pleaded before Congress to be given \$14 billion in funds so as to prevent collapse. Although the House approved the measures, the Senate voted the proposition down with a vote of 52-35. Part of the failure of the bill to pass was due to disagreements over labour cuts, which the Republicans insisted reach parity by next year with those of Japanese carmakers.

General Motors stated that the company would stop 30% of its North American production "in response to rapidly deteriorating market conditions".

### **UN General Assembly approves measures to protect economic, social and cultural rights**

The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a new human rights instrument to protect economic, social and cultural rights.

The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was formally adopted by the General Assembly on human rights day, December 10. The protocol establishes a complaints mechanism to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, allowing individuals to complain to an international body about breaches of the Covenant. Complaints will be heard by the UN's Committee

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The adoption of the optional protocol has been welcomed by human rights groups, with Amnesty International calling it "a historic instrument that secures access to justice for everyone whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated". Souhayr Belhassen, President of the International Federation of Human Rights, said that the protocol would strengthen human rights.

"As we have seen for other rights, the development of an international complaint mechanism for victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights will enable the strengthening of redress mechanisms at the national level, and of policies specifically targeted to ensure the realisation of these rights," he said.

A group of 36 UN human rights experts called the protocol "an essential step towards the establishment of a long-awaited mechanism that reinforces the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights". They called on all states to quickly sign and ratify the protocol.

The optional protocol will now be opened for signature. It will come into force when ratified by 10 parties.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights came into force in 1976 and obliges its parties to protect and progressively implement economic, social, and cultural rights, including labour rights and rights to health, education, and an

adequate standard of living. The Covenant has 159 parties. The United States has signed, but not ratified the Covenant.

### **Asbestos scare shuts down mail delivery in Christchurch, New Zealand**

The Christchurch Mail Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, was evacuated Friday after employees refused to continue working due to exposure to heavy amounts of dust suspected to be asbestos. Tuam 2 Limited, the company set to convert the 27-year-old Christchurch Mail Centre into a new city council building, has been aware of the presence of asbestos in the building since May 2008. Hawkins Construction contacted the New Zealand Department of Labour, voicing concerns of possible exposure to asbestos material. Testing is currently underway at the facility to determine the nature of the exposure.

The Christchurch Mail Centre is operated by New Zealand Post. According to Christchurch Delivery Business Leader Duncan Burman, approximately 50 post workers operate out of the facility, which services about 35,000 addresses in the central Christchurch region.

According to a paper released in June by the Environment Canterbury on the subject of asbestos removal: "Exposure can occur when materials containing asbestos are sanded, sawn, drilled or handled in maintenance or removal tasks." Exposure to asbestos fibers can lead to the diseases mesothelioma, lung cancer, chest cancer, and asbestosis.

Tony Marryatt, chief executive of the city council, was asked by Councillor Helen Broughton for an

explanation of the incident. Councillor Broughton is the only councillor who voted against construction of new city council buildings.

"Councillors made an assumption that the building had been checked by a professional and that's the question I'm going to ask the CEO now. I've asked him for a report on it and I want to see the professional opinion from a building consultant who said that the building was sound and able to be refitted and didn't have any major problems," said Broughton in a statement in The Press.

The owners of the Christchurch Mail Centre informed New Zealand Post that testing performed in November confirmed there was no asbestos "in the area".

Anna Kenny, a spokesperson for the New Zealand trade union Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union said concerns were raised about plumes of dust Friday morning suspected to be asbestos, but that there has been no confirmation of this yet.

According to The Press, Kenny also confirmed that no asbestos was found in a check of the building in November. "Having said that, however, given that the dust is particularly unpleasant and unsafe and of an unknown source, we've asked for further air quality checks to be done before people go back in to that environment and we also want the hazard eliminated," stated Kenny.

### **President-Elect Obama's inaugural donations to be listed online**

The Presidential Inaugural Committee says it is "taking unprecedented steps to insure transparency in the public

reporting of donors" by listing the names of individuals or organizations who donate over \$200 towards President-Elect Barack Obama's upcoming inaugural.

Logging onto <http://www.pic2009.org/page/content/donors/> will show you a current list of over one-hundred sixty nine current donors who have given at least that amount, and for most of the donors, much more. Donors include movie stars, real estate moguls, and sports stars, many of whom also contributed to Obama's presidential campaign.

The Presidential Inaugural Committee states that it has raised almost \$10 million dollars to cover the inaugural; and while that may seem like a large amount, the spending record for an inaugural is held by the current president, George W. Bush, with \$42.8 million spent on his 2004 inaugural.

Nikita Stewart "Inaugural Donations to Be Listed Online". The Washington Post, December 13, 2008  
Emily Cadei "Obama Has Raised \$10 million". CQ Politics, December 12, 2008

### **Scientists detect black hole at center of Milky Way Galaxy**

American and German astronomers have detected and confirmed that there is a 'super-massive' black hole at the center of the Milky Way galaxy. It is approximately 27,000 light years from Earth, and four million times bigger than the Sun. Scientists say it plays a significant role in forming all galaxies.

The 16-year study was performed using two telescopes located in

Chile. They discovered it by tracking the movement of over two dozen separate stars. The study will be published next month in *The Astrophysical Journal*.

### **Zimbabwe accuses United Kingdom of causing cholera epidemic**

An ally of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, Information Minister Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, has said that a cholera epidemic in the country, which killed hundreds of people, was caused by the United Kingdom.

Ndlovu said of the outbreak that it was a "genocidal onslaught on the people of Zimbabwe by the British." It was compared to a "serious biological chemical weapon".

This comes just a day after President Mugabe announced that the cholera epidemic had been stopped, contradicting aid workers saying that the crisis was only getting worse.

Mugabe has already accused Western powers of planning to use the epidemic as a reason to oust him.

Colombia extradites drug lord to the United States  
Diego Montoya, who is alleged to be one of the Colombia's most powerful drug lords, has been handed over to the United States authorities to face trial by Colombia. Montoya will face 12 charges, including those of murder, money laundering, and the trafficking of drugs. If convicted, will serve no less than twenty years in prison.

Montoya was the leader of the Norte del Valle cartel, which is reported to have exported 70% of all the cocaine sold in both the

European Union and the United States at its height. He was on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Top Ten" most wanted fugitives.

### **Rare snowfall strikes southern United States**

Snow has started falling in some southern states of the US, including Louisiana and Mississippi. As much as eight inches of snow were recorded, and thousands of people were left without power - one of Louisiana's largest power suppliers, Cleco Corporation, reported ten thousand outages. Forecasters warned of dangerous driving conditions, and some flights at Louis Armstrong International Airport, located near New Orleans, were affected.

In New Orleans, snow fell today for the first time in four years. The largest snowfall amount for the city ever recorded is about 5 inches, on December 30, 1963.

### **Pin-up queen Bettie Page dies at age 85**

Bettie Page, a model who became famous for her pin-up photos, has died at the age of 85. Page died of complications from a heart attack on Thursday, December 11.

She was born Bettie Mae Page on April 22, 1923 in Nashville, Tennessee. She was also one of the earliest Playmates of the *Month for Playboy* magazine.

### **Estonian law to allow voting by cell phone**

The Parliament of Estonia has passed a law that will allow citizens to vote by mobile phone in the 2011 parliamentary elections. Voters will need free, authorized chips for their phones.

In last year's elections, Estonians voted online. The country's Reform Party proposed mobile voting in

September 2007.

### **Today in History**

1287 - St. Lucia's flood: The Zuider Zee sea wall in the Netherlands collapses, killing over 50,000 people.

1751 - The Theresian Military Academy is founded as the first Military Academy in the world.  
1896 - The Glasgow Underground Railway is opened by the Glasgow District Subway Company.

1955 - Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Portugal, Romania and Spain join the United Nations.  
2003 - President George W. Bush announces the capture of Saddam Hussein.

### **Quote of the Day**

Mark this well, you proud men of action: You are nothing but the unwitting agents of the men of thought who often, in quiet self-effacement, mark out most exactly all your doings in advance. ~ Heinrich Heine

### **Word of the Day**

- dodecahedron *n*
- (geometry) A polyhedron with twelve faces; the regular dodecahedron has twelve regular pentagons as faces.

### **About Wikinews**

We are a group of volunteer journalists whose mission is to create a diverse community where citizens from around the globe (including **you**) can collaborate to report the news on a wide variety of current events. By making our content perpetually available for free redistribution and use, we hope to contribute to a global digital commons.

**Got news and no computer?  
Call the Wikinews Hotline**  
+1-866-653-4265

**About Wikinews**

(toll-free in the U.S.)  
+1-202-742-5918  
(outside the U.S.)  
+44-871-218-6397  
(U.K. / Europe)

**License**

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License. Articles published in this Print edition were created by Wikinewsies. Other content released under the GNU Free Documentation License.

To view a copy of the CC-BY license, visit:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

or send a letter to

Creative Commons  
543 Howard Street, 5th Floor  
San Francisco, California, 94105, USA

To view a copy of the GFDL, visit:

<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>

Wikipedia Current Events

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Current\\_events](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Current_events)

Today in History

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

Quote of the Day

[http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Main_Page)

Word of the Day

[http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page)

**About Wikinews Print Edition**

For more information about Wikinews Print Edition visit: <http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Print>